On Monday, I hosted the first 10th Congressional District Diabetes Summit in Glenview in conjunction with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation (JDRF) . Diabetes is a disease that affects over 20 million Americans. This number is projected to grow to over 30 million by the year 2030. Additionally, more than 175,000 children have this disease.

One of the major reasons why I became active in the fight against diabetes is because of 11-year-old Clara Livingston. Clara was first diagnosed with diabetes when she was four years old. Like many diabetics, she must prick her finger at least eight times a day to test her blood sugar levels. She has to insert a one-and-a-half-inch needle into her stomach every two to three days. Her diet also is carefully monitored to regulate carbohydrates. These precautions are needed to prevent blindness, kidney failure and a shortened life span – all symptoms of juvenile diabetes. For Clara's sake and for everyone living with diabetes, we need to mobilize every available resource to find a cure.

Clara's mother, Gretchen, is the volunteer legislative chair for JDRF and was incredibly instrumental in setting up the summit. The crowd of local families heard from some of the nation's top diabetes researchers, including Myrlene Staten, M.D., Senior Advisor for Diabetes Translational Research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH), Cynthia Rice, Director of New Technology Access at JDRF, Northwestern Professor William Lowe and University of Chicago Professor Christopher Rhodes. Click on each presenter's name to see their presentation.

When we look at the progress we have made in recent years with diabetes research, we should be optimistic about the prospects for discovering a cure. Just compare the state of diabetes treatment and research in the 1970's to what is available today. The National Institutes of Health spent a meager $18 million on diabetes research funding in 1970. Today, the Congress appropriates more than $450 million annually to diabetes research funding by NIH.

Our investment has paid off. Advances such as insulin pumps, insulin inhalers, continuous glucose monitors and the artificial pancreas project provide hope for patients living with this disease as researchers are racing toward developing both a cure and devices that make the diabetes more manageable. I have seen these advances improve the lives of the young

Americans that I represent in Congress. One of the untold stories of federal funding for research is that it has already saved lives and improved the health care for millions. It shows that when we back these researchers, we will improve the lives of children in the new century.

However, the President's fiscal year 2008 budget request calls for a 1.1 percent cut in NIH funding. I oppose this proposed funding cut and am pleased that the Labor and Health Appropriations bill passed the House with an increase in funding to NIH to almost $30 billion.

Due to my work as the primary architect of the effort that brought the stem cell bill to a vote on the House floor during the 109th Congress, I was asked by the Congressional Diabetes Caucus to serve as Vice-Chair during the 110th Congress. I chose to lead because of Clara. I have me so many kids whose parents support JDRF. It is the organization I feel closest to and will support JDRF in Congress and long into my own retirement one day.

I am honored to serve in this capacity, and I look forward to educating fellow Members of Congress about diabetes-related issues and concerns. You can read more about the Congressional Diabetes Caucus here , or read more about the legislation we need to enact to boost research here .

Congressman Kirk gives a legislative update at the 10th District Diabetes Summit

presentations. Congressman Kirk and JDRF Volunteer Legislative Chair Gretchen Livingston listen to research

The JDRF Team: Gretchen Livingston, Cynthia Rice, Chuck Balling and Congressman Kirk

The National Kidney Foundation of Illinois' KidneyMobile

Congressman Kirk inside the KidneyMobile